

V. Bad Language

A. The Character Of Our Speech

What should be the characteristics of our speech?

Colossians 4:6

- Grace, meaning favorable, pleasant, dignified
- Seasoned with salt

Seasoned [ARTUO] means to arrange, make ready. Hence, think before you speak.

Salt makes food more palatable, and is used as a preservative for meats. Thus, speech free of corruption.

Titus 2:8

1 Timothy 6:3

- Sound [HUGIES] (from whence, "hygiene") means healthy.
- Controlled, mastery of our bodies

James 3:2-4

1 Corinthians 6:12, 13

The purpose of this study is to examine various speech forms unbefitting Christians. A word of clarification is made at the outset. This study deals candidly with words that are commonly used in an ugly way. As the lesson progresses, the discussion of these words and examples cited are not intended to offend but instruct. As much discretion as possible is used, but if the matter is not clearly stated, the student will end up wondering exactly what kind of language is wrong.

B. Abusing God's Name

1. Old Testament Attitudes:

Exodus 20:7 ...not take God's name in vain...

Psalms 111:9 ...holy and reverend is Thy name...

Out of respect, one of the Hebrew's words for God, YHWH, was never pronounced.

2. New Testament Application:

Matthew 6:9 ...hallowed be Thy name...

The rich who slander the holy name:

James 2:7

Many people today throw the name of God around like a by-word or an idle exclamation. We should speak God's name only when we are talking about Him in reverence or to Him in prayer.

C. Cursing And Swearing

1. The Curse

Note Peter's language in his denial. This was apparently something he was not accustomed to doing.

Mark 14:71

Curse means devoted to destruction [ANATHEMA].

Galatians 1:8,9

James 3:2-12

Consider the irony of blessing God and cursing men with the same lips (verses 8 - 10). God compels us to love our enemies. A faithful Christian would never wish damnation in hell upon his worst enemies; he would not even say it in jest.

Matthew 5:44

2. Flippant Use Of The Word "Hell"

Some have no fear of hell or what it means to go there for eternity. Hell is real, and it is sobering and horrifying to think of such a terrible place. We need to take it seriously. It is therefore not a word for us to throw around mindlessly for emphasis or an interjection. See the New Testament description of hell:

Mark 9:42-50

Perhaps it's best to use the word "hell" only when we're actually talking to someone about the place of eternal punishment and the need to avoid going there (or when we're talking about not saying it).

3. Idle Oaths

Swear not by moon and stars, swear to God solemnly, as in marriage vows, not frivolously or void of substance.

Matthew 5:33-37

James 5:12

An oath is essentially the same thing as a vow, as at a wedding; it's effectively the noun form of "to swear." Some have suggested these passages teach that a Christian should never make any oath for any reason. However, God himself made oaths:

Hebrews 6:16-18

The point is that we need to think seriously about the words we say and be true to our words, whether we seal them with an oath or not. Nevertheless, if someone believes they should not "solemnly swear to tell the whole truth so help them God," then it would be sin for them to so speak, violating their conscience. There are other ways of saying, "God as my witness, I am telling the truth." On the other hand, if we are constantly swearing to God or anyone or anything else for the truthfulness of what we're saying, it becomes trivial. This was the point Jesus was making.

D. Vulgarity, Filth, And Profanity

1. What defiles?

Matthew 15:11, 17-20

Mark 7:15-23

2. What not to say.

- Unwholesome words:

Ephesians 4:29

Positively stated, this means not just non-healthy, but rotten and putrid, as dead bodies were "unclean" under Moses' Law.

- Filthiness, foolish talking, and dirty jokes:

Ephesians 5:3,4

"Let it not even be named among you" suggests not so much as even making mention. There should not be even a hint of making sex and the body a dirty thing; such is unfitting of Christians.

- Shameful speech:

Ephesians 5:11, 12

These things are not a source of humor. Abstaining from sexual immorality (2 Thessalonians 4:3) means we also don't talk about sexuality in a perverted way.

Curse words and the name of God are words acceptably uttered in the proper context, for example, when appropriately discussing the judgment of the Lord. Vulgar language, however, has a certain vocabulary all its own; there is never a proper situation for these words to ever come out of our mouth.

- Obscenities:

Colossians 3:8

Put aside abusive speech, which includes all things repulsive and disgusting to the senses. Unseemly body parts, bodily functions, and waste material should not be spoken of out of proper context.

- Profanities:

1 Timothy 1:9

The verb form of profane means to take that which is special and make it common, to make the holy debased, and to make the beautiful ugly.

E. Offensive Words

Some words formerly not considered offensive are considered unfitting today by reason of common understanding. To illustrate, the King James Bible was translated in 1611. Since then, some words have changed from inoffensive to offensive by reason of their abuse. Several instances are found in the King James rendering of the following verses. For discretion, the modern, inoffensive word is shown below:

Hebrews 12:8 KJV ("illegitimate")

1 Kings 14:10 KJV ("urinate")

We must watch how we use our liberties. We should not think we can use these words freely in our speech today just because they appear in the King James Bible. Besides, those words at that time were used in proper context, not in a perverted way. Consider these points:

- Give no offense.

1 Corinthians 8:7, 9-13; 10:32

Our words should not mislead and encourage others to sin.

- Be an example.

Titus 2:7

If you use words that are marginally acceptable, others will be influenced by you to cross the line.

- Use good judgment.

Proverbs 25:11

F. Euphemisms

A euphemism is a word of lesser offense, typically accepted by society, substituted for a word of greater offense.

What matters most is that which we are actually saying. The primary concern is not what words in particular we are using but the message we are conveying. If the meaning is the same as if we had used the word of greater offense, we might as well have used the bad word.

Euphemisms appear in various forms and cover virtually all types of bad language as outlined above. Some examples follow:

1. Variations and sound-alikes:

- God's name: gee, geez, gosh, golly

- Curses: heck, dang, darn, dog-gone-it

Webster's English dictionary defines these words to be such substitutes.

- Vulgar: shoot, freaking

Sometimes the substitute word sounds so much like the overtly offensive one that a person is misunderstood to actually use it. Think about what this does to your influence.

2. Foreign words:

God knows what is being said.

3. Spelling or first letters:

- Offensive: S.O.B.

4. Gestures:

A gesture can be considered a euphemism where a symbol is substituted for an ugly word. (Foreign gestures follow the same rule). If the word is unfit for a Christian to use, so is the gesture that means the same thing.

A founding principle to be first learned about morals is avoidance:

1 Thessalonians 5:22

The word here translated "abstain" means to hold off from, to have had enough of. The word for "appearance" means that which meets the eye, the shape, form, and fashion of a thing. Foul language is another evil to be avoided. Euphemisms are a way of getting as close as possible to using foul language without actually uttering the offensive word. The faithful Christian will avoid it.

G. Corrective Action

James 1:26

How do we make correction? Speech is easily a thing we do out of habit and without thought. Given this, it is easy to develop improper speech patterns, especially when the world sees nothing wrong with filthy talk or euphemisms. God, however, expects certain behavior from His followers.

1. Take responsibility

You may have improper speech and not be aware of it because it's a thoughtless habit. Make the effort to listen to yourself objectively and compare your language with the biblical principles shown here. Develop new habits where necessary. It may be a struggle at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Allow yourself no excuses. We often hear people say, "excuse my French" after using foul language. This is nothing more than a lame apology for a lack of self control. We all need a verbal "vent" sometimes, an exclamation, or an expletive. Find wholesome substitutes suitable for a Christian's tongue.

2. Increase knowledge

Increasing knowledge increases awareness. Apply what is learned from this study to your speech. Take the matter seriously.

3. Make the heart pure

What comes out of the mouth is an expression of what is inside the heart. If the heart is full of only that which is pure, nothing evil even has a chance of coming out.

Matthew 12:33-37

The word translated "idle" [ARGOS] means useless, inactive, barren, fruitless, words that do nothing (hence the inert gas, argon). Remember that as we may use idle words, we will have to give an account of whether they are harmless or condemning.

4. Don't laugh at dirty jokes

Laughing shows approval; approval is consent; consent is guilt. We all want to be liked by others and "fit in." Do not deceive yourself into thinking you can just go along passively participating in such a thing. Though the joke may not come out of your mouth, you share the guilt.

5. Choose carefully your associates

Better yet, try to avoid even hearing dirty jokes in the first place. The bad speech habits of others are easily adopted by us if we hear them constantly. When you can, modify your environment to lessen your exposure to foul language; separate yourselves.

H. Thoughts And Questions For Discussion

1. Why is using the word "God" for mere emphasis in our speech wrong?
2. When is it wrong for a Christian to swear or make an oath?
3. Should a man's speech when he is around only men be any different from when he is around women and children?
4. Does a crisis or disaster ever justify using bad language?
5. Do certain occupations or situations justify using foul speech?
6. What is the real difference between using the word "God" and "gosh" as an expletive in a sentence?
7. What is the real difference between using the word "hell" and "heck" as a curse in a sentence?
8. How can you know if your language is acceptable to God?